Design Resource

Applique Cloth Pillar - Madurai

A Textile Craft

by
Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Srikanth B.
NID, Bengaluru

Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/applique-cloth-pillar-madurai

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2. Tools and Raw Materials
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Introduction

There are various types of ancient folk art in India. Applique art is one of them. The term applique means 'to apply'. In this art, one piece of fabric is sewn over another fabric for decorative purposes. The word 'applique' is a French verb, "applique," meaning "to put on." One cannot trace back the history of this art. It is an age-old technique in which craftsmen used to sew the patches of different materials over the ripped area of the cloth. This is also known as patchwork. It has importance in many ritual ceremonies. Apart from decorating royalty clothing, applique was used to decorate a temple's ceremonial umbrellas and tents.

Applique art is practiced all over India. Andhra Pradesh, Gujrat, Orissa, Rajasthan, and Madurai are the main centers for this craft. Each state developed its style of applique. It is a sight to behold whenever a temple car rolls down the streets of the city with the `thumbnail' or cloth pillar swaying in a gentle breeze. They add colour to the festive occasion. Thombai is a cylindrical shaped hanging decoration filled with applique work mostly used in South India. In every temple, the festival chariot is mostly used which is incomplete without Thombai.

Essentially, decorative art requires sewing small and separate pieces of cloth into one big frame. The bright colours selected for the purpose are eye-catching, and the design created is appealing. Along with the temple related items, one can see designs like an elephant, flowers, and swan on the Thombai hanging. Thombai is used as a decorative item in home decoration as well as in temples and chariots. In the process of making Thombai, the pieces of fabric are sewed or stuck onto a larger piece to form a picture or pattern. The applique can also be made in silk and velvet, besides traditional cotton.

Applique art is centuries old in Temple City. In those days, there were no sewing machines, and the entire applique was done with hands. Therefore, it took more than a year to complete any single piece of work. The artisans stayed in temples for years together to finish a job on hand. Not only the craftsman has to be a good tailor, but he should also be an artist with the ability to visualize his art. He has to create applique motifs in contrasting colours in the shape of animals, birds, flowers, minor deities, and other geometric shapes. He must have a fair sense of symmetry, which is usually practiced on dazzling red, purple, yellow, green, and white fabric. It is estimated that thousands of families were involved in the business in Tamil Nadu. But now, the community is almost extinct, with only a handful of families carrying on this work of art and trying to make both ends meet.

In the olden days, the craftsmen used to make canopies, banners, and umbrellas in applique for all major festivals held in Madurai's famous temple. As the craft's popularity spread far and wide through the mouth of pilgrims visiting the city, the craftsmen started making other decorative and utility items as well. Various products of applique work such as `Thombai', `Vasamalai' (arch work), Thoranam (ornamental artwork hung on door frames), etc., are used in the temple to enhance the aesthetic look. Thombai is available in various lengths and diameters. Sendrai Perumal, for more than a decade, is into making temple applique artwork and decoration items in Madurai district, Tamil Nadu. Now let's see how a Thombai is made.

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Applique cloth pillar artist Mr. Prakash.

A set of applique cloth pillars with an umbrella.

Artisan is showing 6 feet applique cloth pillar.

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Artisans decorated the Chariot with applique art.

Workplace where artists work.

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Tools and Raw Materials

The tools and raw materials that are used for applique cloth pillar are as follows:

- **Thread:** It is used to stitch the coloured pieces together.
- **Coloured Cloth:** It is a primary material to make the applique cloth pillar.
- **Sewing Machine:** It is used to stitch the cloth pieces together.
- **Scissor:** It is used to cut the cloth into the required number of pieces.
- **Piping Lace:** It is used to stitch along the periphery of the design to highlight it.
- **Zari Border:** It is added along the edges of the cloth to highlight it.
- **Stapler:** It is used to fix the designs temporarily in place before stitching.
- **Newspaper:** It is used as a template to mark the designs on the cloth.
- **Glue:** It is used to stick the designs in place before stitching them together with cloth.
- **Metal Wire:** It is used to make an armature on which the applique cloth is fixed to retain the desired shape.
- **Fabric Paint:** It is used to paint the details of the design on the cloth.
- **Brush:** It is used to apply paint during detailing.

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The coloured cloth is the basic item used to make the applique cloth pillar.

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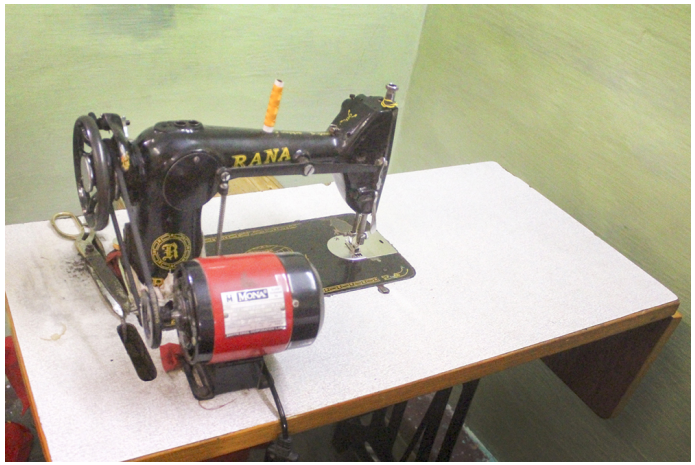

The sewing machine is used to stitch the cloth pieces together.

Scissor is used to cut the cloth into the required number of pieces.

Thread is used to stitch the coloured pieces together.

Brush and colour are used to apply paint during detailing.

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The piping lace is used to stitch along the periphery of the design to highlight it.

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Making Process

Making of applique cloth pillar starts with preparing the ring, which gives the pillar its shape. Depending on the height of the pillar, the number of rings can be increased or decreased. For a pillar of about 5 feet, approximately five rings are used. The rings are made using thick wires, which are rolled to form a ring. This decides the diameter of the cloth pillar. The diameter is approximately one and a half feet. The cloth pillar can be made out of cotton, silk, or velvet fabric. A single piece of cloth slightly larger than the circumference of the ring is measured and cut. This cloth is attached with threads at an equal distance for tying the ring together with it. This cloth acts as the lining for the design, which is stitched together along with it. The motif cloth is made up of many coloured pieces stitched together, having various motifs on it. The most commonly used motifs are flowers, elephants, geometric forms, etc.

To make the motifs, the designs are sketched on the newspaper or some kind of plain paper. After sketching, the designs are cut out of paper by using scissors. Once the design is ready, the colour and fabric for the design are chosen, and it is folded into layers to make multiple pieces at a time, which are used repeatedly on the cloth pillar. The fabric is folded in such a way that it is slightly larger than the design to be cut. The paper cut out is stapled onto the folded cloth placing in the center. Once the designs are cut, the cut motifs are placed in their respective places on motif cloth as per design. Then cut motifs are pasted onto the strips of motif cloth using glue. These motif cloths are of two different sizes, alternating each other throughout the length of the cloth pillar.

Once the pasted design dries, the border piping around the motif is stitched on each motif. Once the piping is ready, different sized motif cloths are stitched together, alternatively changing the size along with the lining fabric. This shows the various designs on the cloth pillar separately. The design is stitched in such a way that the threads have appeared on the backside of the cloth.

The entire design is folded axially and stitched so that it forms a tube, allowing the motifs to be inside the pipe, leaving the threads to tie with the rings outside. Zari border is attached at the bottom of the cloth pillar and the top of a cone. Now each ring is individually tied equidistantly on the cloth pillar. The rings are attached one after the other, depending on the length. The cloth tube is pulled inside out to expose the design. After tying all the rings and turning the pipe inside out, the cloth pillar is ready.

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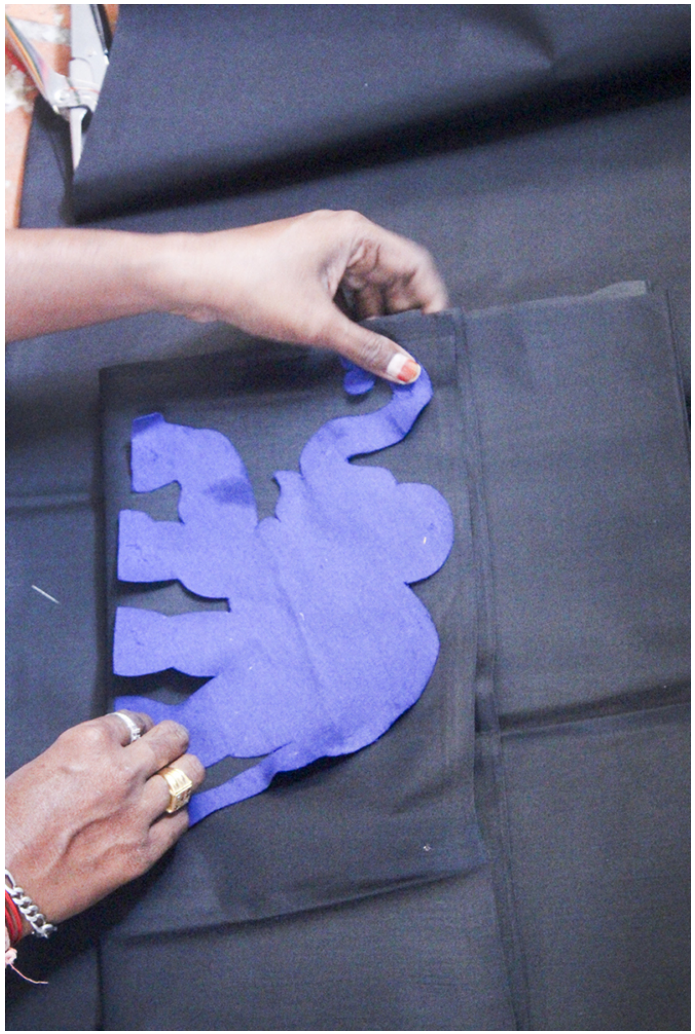
The cloth pillar can be made out of cotton, silk or velvet fabric.

Artisan use stapler to fix the designs temporarily in place before tracing the outline.



The Most commonly used motifs are flowers, elephants and geometric forms etc.

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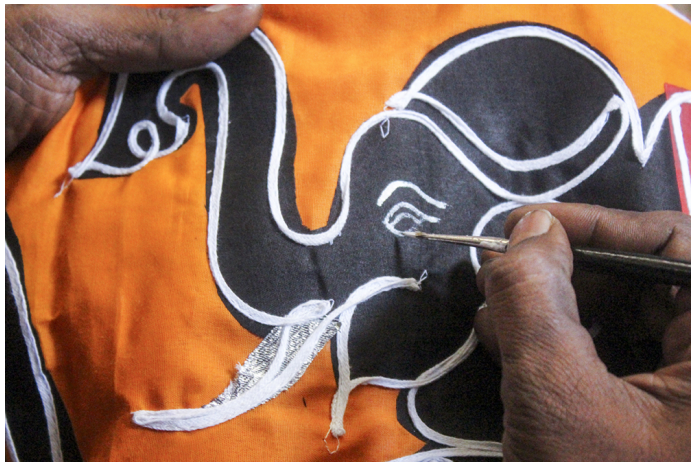
Cutting the design out of the cloth.

Once the design is cut, the motifs are placed in their respective places on motif cloth as per design.

The cut motifs are placed in their respective places on cloth as per design.



Once the motifs are pasted, women artisan starts painting process.

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The artisan is in the painting process for details.

Different sized motif pieces are stitched together along with the lining fabric.

The artisan is adding the zari border along the edges.

Adding a zari border along the edges for highlighting the art.

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Rings are used for giving shape.

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For a pillar of about 5 feet, approximately five rings are used.

Women artists engaged in the making of applique cloth pillar.

The artisan is showing 5 feet applique cloth pillar.

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Products

The bright coloured Thombai or cloth pillar comes in various sizes. One foot long Thombai is having a circumference of 18 inches. For 2 feet long, it is about 24 inches. For 3 feet to 8 feet Thombai, the circumference is about 36 inches. Nine feet to 12 feet Thombai, circumferences is about 42 inches. For 13 feet to 18 feet long Thombai, the circumference is about 48 inches. The price of the Thombai ranges from INR 250 to INR 400.

The bright coloured 3 feet cloth pillar.

Lord Hanuman's motif on Thombai (applique cloth pillar).

Artisan showing a piece of applique art.

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An Umbrella decorated with various colours and different motifs.

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Video

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